



No Turning Back

Poems of Freedom 1990-1993

DIBUSSI TANDE

VISIT...

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To BB
"Their Champagne Party Will End!!"
&
To Mama
For everything...

"I believe it is impossible
to write anything in Africa
without some kind of
commitment, some
kind of message,
some kind of protest."

CHINUA ACHEBE

(Nigerian novelist)

The Anglophone Cameroonian writer must never forget his origins. His writings must depict the conditions of his people, expressing their spontaneous feelings of betrayal, protest and anger... The Anglophone Cameroonian writer at home and in the Diaspora must tell the outside world of the story of his tragic land, from the point of view of its hostage minority.

BATE BESONG

(Cameroonian poet, playwright and human rights activist)

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Preface

In the first two decades of independence, African regimes went out of their way to stifle or control artistic and literary creativity, and to crackdown on writers who championed the cause of political liberalism. This crackdown produced two diametrically opposed reactions across the continent. In countries such as Nigeria, it led to the birth of a thriving protest literature which became a thorn in the flesh of successive authoritarian regimes. In countries such as Cameroon, the result was auto-censorship and conformism, or exile.

When the wind of change began blowing across Africa in the early 1990s, a new generation of novelists, playwrights, poets and journalists emerged who publicly challenged the continent's authoritarian regimes. They became the pacesetters for the clamor for political pluralism, the rule of law and the respect of basic human rights.

The poems in this collection are a product of that wave of unabashed, daring, uncompromising and anti-establishment philosophy which was the hallmark of the politically turbulent and fiery 1990s.

The collection is about the travails of Africa and Africans during that period of political turmoil, which was characterized by buoyant optimism in spite of the widespread violence and repression. It is an unambiguous tribute to thousands of faceless Africans who were engaged in an often painful, bloody but heroic struggle for democracy and human rights. It is also a "red card" to those dictators who refused to give in gracefully to the clamor for democracy.

The main source of inspiration and the point of departure of this collection is however the fate of Cameroon's English-speaking minority, commonly referred to as the *Anglophones*, within the bilingual Cameroon Republic.

The poems were either immediate reactions to ongoing events, deep reflections on the past, present and future, or the product of personal experiences. For example, "Black Power" was written barely hours after the first images of the April 1992 Los Angeles riots were beamed on Cameroon Television. "Broken Dreams" was the result of intense meditation on what is known as the *Anglophone problem* in Cameroon, while "Detention blues" is based on my recollections of a five-day stay in jail for having participated in the University of Yaounde students' pro-democracy protest movement of April-May 1991.

The first part of the collection titled VISION is a poet's take on the issues, personalities, and events that left an indelible mark on the Cameroonian and African protest generation of the early nineties. Part two, TRIBULATIONS, is about the doubts, fears, frustrations, anger, and the pain

of African masses with respect to the socio-political turmoil of that period. Part three, SONGS OF HOPE, whose length is largely disproportionate to the first two, is exclusively on the (broken) dreams of Anglophone Cameroonians and their visions of the future.

Some of the poems in this collection have already been published elsewhere; "Gathering clouds" in the Summer 1994 issue of *Treasured poems of America*; "After the Hurricane" in the Summer 1994 issue of the *Arcadia Poetry Anthology*; "The dreamer" in the *Weekly Post* newspaper; "We shall rise again" in *A time of hope; Anglophones on the Anglophone problem*; and "Broken dreams" in the *Cameroon Post* Newspaper. All of the poems were written in Cameroon except for "Fading dream", written in Chicago on the eve of the thirtieth anniversary of the historic 1963 civil rights March on Washington.

This collection would never have been possible without the direct or indirect contribution of many great people. My greatest thanks go to poet and playwright, Llonney Eyole-Monono, without whose prodding I would never have written those first verses back in 1990; to George Ngwane who achieved the impossible feat of making me believe that these poems were worth publishing; to Elive Efokoa, Fayeofori Amabibi, Mbua Motutu and Ndeh Avwontom whose usually unauthorized but valuable criticisms helped make these poems better; to my mother who was my pillar during those long days in Cameroon when I struggled to transform my jumbled ideas into coherent words; and to my brother Makuna for his continued support.

I also thank Kangsen Wakai and JK Bannavti for reviewing the final manuscript; Joyce Ashutantang for taking time off her busy schedule to write the foreword to the collection; and Abidemi Olowonira, "the man with the golden brush", for the beautiful cover design.

Finally, I thank Terese and Mokali for graciously allowing me indulge in my time-consuming literary and other writing pursuits even when this has meant less family time.

Foreword

Dibussi Tande is an Anglophone Cameroonian. At least this is the threshold on which he stands in this collection of poetry titled *No turning back*. Yet Dibussi forces us to turn back and look at the pivotal volcanic moments in Cameroon's history between 1990- 1993. During this time the wind of change which brought down the Berlin Wall and fueled the Perestroika train reached Cameroon. The result was not only the launching of the Social Democratic front by Ni John Fru Ndi in 1990, an event which ushered in multi-party politics in Cameroon, but a renaissance of Anglophone Cameroon Nationalism or what became known as "the Anglophone Cameroon question". After over thirty years of a hopeless marriage with La Republic du Cameroun, Anglophone Cameroonians embarked on self-determination amidst arbitrary arrests, civil unrest, death threats, including cultural and political annihilation. The crowning moment of this self-determination was the organization of the first All Anglophone Conference in 1993.

As a student activist and budding journalist during this historic period, Dibussi captures cadences of this struggle eloquently in this collection of poetry.

As the foremost Anglophone Cameroon playwright, Bate Besong, holds "A writer with no sense of history is like a sparrow without wings, for the writer must be the visionary of living truth". The poems in this collection thus frame the individual in a historical sweep of events.

The collection is divided into three sections. The first section is titled Visions. It is George Ngwane, the Anglophone Cameroon Africanist scholar who opined that, where the older generation in Cameroon dreamt dreams, the young men of today should see visions. Yes, Dibussi Tande has a vision of a more humane and peaceful Cameroon/Africa but that peace will definitely come at a price. For example although in the poem, "Gathering Clouds", the clouds are followed by "lightening that "violently barks" and the speaker sees "fury in the horizon", one is also aware of the cleansing nature of a violent downpour. Like James Ene Henshaw's Fortune Teller puts it in his memorable play, *This is our chance*, "A mighty wind shall blow, a great rain shall fall, much harm shall be done. But out of destruction there shall be calm". This same duality is captured in the title poem of the collection, "No turning back". In this poem, the poet holds that "Stars shine brightest/when the day is darkest". In fact, Dibussi like Henshaw's Fortune Teller, concludes this poem with these words,

Tyranny shall glow
And blood will flow
But the dream shall live on
Until freedom is won.

Moreover, a poem like “Detention Blues” which captures the loss of freedom and torture from soldiers with “sadistic glee”, still ends on an energetic note, “But our cause had been noble and right”. In addition, another poem “Liberty city” captures this hopeful vision as the poet declares, “hold on freedom lover/Darkness would soon be over.

But Dibussi’s vision for a better world stretches beyond Cameroon. “El Norte”, “Black Power” and “Fading Dream” frame the United States as a place with paradoxes that may see Martin Luther King’s dream fade away if the vision of “Medgar, Martin and Malcolm(continue to be) devoured”.

The second section of this collection of poems “Tribulations” is the vantage position from which the poet can be a visionary. The titles are very revealing. The titles range from “Plunderers”, “Disillusion”, “Betrayed”, to “Democracy”. With these titles one can easily piece together the story of Cameroon: The ruling president for 25 years and counting, Paul Biya has plundered the nation, the people feel betrayed, disillusion is rampant and “demoCRAZY” now reigns.

However the third section titled “Songs of hope” brings the reader back to a vision of hope. These poems return to Dibussi’s main area of focus, Anglophone Cameroon. In the opening poem of the section, “Broken Dreams”, he considers Anglophone Cameroonians in a francophone dominated Republic of Cameroon as:

A minority deprived of its dignity
And callously cheated of its property
The helpless victims of majority rule

It is a situation which Emmanuel Doh has also called “horizontal colonialism” and according to the revolutionary playwright and poet, Bate Besong, “the agony of the Anglophone Cameroon question is compounded by the endless uncertainty as to whether there would ever be an end to it”. But it is precisely the end that Dibussi sees in the final poem of the collection, “We Shall Rise Again”. This is Dibussi’s apocalyptic vision for Anglophone Cameroon:

The mighty Fako mountain
And the crumbling Bismarck fountain
Shall spit out freedom’s fiery venom
That will end this shameful serfdom;
Our Nation shall be born again
And our freedom forever regained.

This poem carries the image and vision of hope that dominates the collection. While the “crumbling Bismarck fountain” acknowledges our crumbling colonial

past, the image of “mighty Fako Mountain” underscores the potential of postcolonial realities. But what stands out here is that Dibussi sees the hybridity embedded in these two powerful images as the foundation of a new nation, a new nation where Anglophone Cameroonians would not be treated as “serfs” on their own land and our past will play a role in our present for a wholesome human existence.

However, besides the content, what makes this collection of poems truly memorable is the lucidity with which the poems are rendered. These poems exude the poet’s youthful exuberance at the time that they were written. The poems are very accessible and despite Dibussi’s admiration for the prolific playwright and poet, Bate Besong’s “Soyinka style” of poetry, Dibussi instead fits into the poetic school of another prolific poet, Niyi Osundare. In an interview, Osundare explained that poems by poets of the generation before him like:

Soyinka, Okigbo, J.P Clark and Kofi Awoonor were extremely difficult, particularly those by Soyinka and Okigbo...When I started writing... I felt it was the duty of the new generation of Nigerian (African) poets to bring poetry back to the people.

With poetry collections like Dibussi’s, poetry readily returns to the people and this is worthy of our attention. Enjoy!!

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The Gathering Clouds

I hear a sound so loud
Announcing the gathering clouds
Signs of an impending storm
That's about to come.

The Lightening violently barks
Peeling off all tree barks
The thunder angrily roars
Like the splashy slap of oars
Devoid of the sun's rays
The sky's filled with gray.

I hear the frightened cry of trees
Bowing to the dictates of the breeze
Doves screech in distress
And lambs bleat under stress
Women wail and mourn
Over the cataclysm to come.

I see fury in the horizon
And fire in our Amazon
I see a Dantean inferno
With its apocalyptic innuendoes
I hear a sound so loud
Announcing the gathering clouds.

The Cry (Freedom!!)

It galvanized
And organized,
Brought actions,
Merged factions;
Crippled autocracy,
Ushered in democracy.

But 'twas a dangerous dope
A strange kind of coke
That killed objectivity
And dulled lucidity
Thwarted missions
And blurred visions
Worshipped intolerance
And idolized intransigence.

A coin with two sides,
A hazy picture slide;
A slogan for liberation,
An instrument for oppression.
A cry of fervor,
A tool for terror.
An ode to the heirs,
A moan of despair.
A cry so fickle,
a complex riddle...

No Turning Back

Stars shine brightest
When the day is darkest
No matter how much we sway
The truth shall have its way.

Tanks will roll
But liberty shan't fall
Canons will roar
But the dove shall soar
The sling will swing
But the Olive branch shall sing

Oppressors shall freedom fight
And exhibit their cowardly might;
Dusk to dawn curfew
Freedom for a select few.
Censorship of the press
Dissenting views repressed.
Intolerance canonized
Persecution idolized.

Tyranny shall glow
And blood will flow
But the dream shall live on
Until freedom is won.

Detention Blues *(Remembering the martyrs of May 6, 1991)*

Trapped during the lightening raid
With no one coming to our aid,
We found ourselves in the lion's den
And of our fate we knew nothing then.

Bundled into trucks like filthy pigs
To our protests they didn't give a fig;
"Sing your songs again!" roared a voice.
But from our throats came no noise.

Thrown into dark and eerie cells
We felt like in hell;
A frightening and unholy shrine
With its unbearable stench of urine.

To our dungeon no light came
As day and night looked same.
Of our imminent release we hoped
As in the dark we groped.

The daily scenario never got better;
"Where is your tiny leader
The so-called iron lady
Who's nothing but a cry baby?"

"Talk and you'll leave this gutter."
But not a word did we utter.
Enraged, they promised us hell.
The future certainly did not augur well...

Our jailers went on with sadistic glee
Knowing we could not flee.
Polishing their truncheons and fists,
They happily prepared for the feast.

But their ghoulish party was not to be
For the world came to our rescue
Asking that we be set free.
Dismayed, our hangmen simply took the cue.
It had been a painful and unequal fight
But our cause had been noble and right.

I shall Conquer (*Dirge of the African dictator*)

Mine was once a land of peace
Now it's being torn to pieces.
My people and I once had one destiny
And we lived in total harmony.
They listened only to my voice
And made not the slightest noise.
It was an age of unity
Integrity and unanimity;
A period of forceful integration
Not voluntary disintegration,
The era of abundant milk and honey
And excess money.

But today all's different,
Gone's yesterday's deference.
See how my effigy's being torn
And my national gown no longer worn!
All because of this talk about democracy
and this so-called equality.
What impudence!!
What imprudence!!

They want to make me cower
In an attempt to grab my power,
Challenging my valor
And tarnishing my honor,
Welcoming my generosity
With nothing but animosity;
Now they act like I'm crazy
Because of this heresy called democracy!

My voice now goes unheard
All they want is my head.
But my power's not for takes;
I will not break
I'll stay awake.

I'm a man of steel
Not a fragile sea eel;
The father of the nation,
The god of positive action
Patriotically organizing human kills;
Nothing but a minor blood spills.
I'm the land's golden apple,
The true man of the people.

These troublesome flies
Would be sent to fry.
In their mad power rush,
They'll be mercilessly crushed.
From the entrails of my bunker,
I swear I shall conquer.

“El Norte”

They call you God's own country
A land where hopes never get hewed
Where dreams always come true,
A land of milk and honey.

I thrill at the stories about you
But I cringe at your unseen view.
Seems you're the land of evil materialism
And of rugged individualism
Where the rich squander billions
Though the hungry are in millions;
That your star spangled banner
Is but a skeletal pirate banner
Cloaking your ghoulish manners;
That your statue of liberty
Is a Medusa-faced beauty
Transforming liberty's burning rage
Into everlasting bondage.

How can you brandish freedom's flame
When your slave masters run untamed
How can your people be decreed equal
"Separate but equal" ...
How can dreams and nightmares
Ride on the same mare?
Please tell me and I'll let you be.

Black Power

All that glitters' not gold
Goes the saying of the old.
The city of angels
Has unearthed its mongrels
The beautiful sun city
Has become ugly sin city
The legendary Hollywood
Has exhibited its rotten wood
Infested with bugs of racism
And ants of narcissism.
All its glamour
Hides nothing but rancor.

It's oppressed have risen
Calling the oppressors to reason,
Matching racist power
With people's power.
The children of a lesser god
Have pulled out their swords;
Terror's unleashed
As anger's released
People's fury unfurls
As the drama unfolds
Hurricane Rodney
Is gone loony

The haughty angel city
Is just another burnt out city
Crippled by the cataclysmic echoes

From its furious ghettos
And by that ultimate power;
Street power
People's power
Black power!!!

Fading Dream (*Remembering the March on Washington*)

Three score years
And we still drown in pain and tears
The dream is no more
The vision is all gone
Our "four lil children"
have transformed it all
Into a gory nightmare.

Gangs in the street
Desperately itching for the kill,
Lyrics with no beat
That fuel anger's fury,
Violence, drugs 'n' guns
That leave us all burnt out.

The sweat of yesterday's marchers
Has made us all blind
The fading echoes of marching feet
Have deafened them all.

Slowly the dream recedes
As doomsday beckons
From the fountain of peace
Gushes out jets of blood.
From the garden of hope
Sprouts petals of despair.

Medgar, Martin, Malcolm!!!
Your great and timeless vision
Is being devoured
By the eerie darkness
Of a night just begun.

“Francophilie”

'Tis one of those feasts
Witnessed with clenched fists.
A time for mental slavery
And abominable treachery;
Time to hail an alien culture
That seems so immature,
To trample on one's heritage
And beg for everlasting bondage:

Negroes dreaming of *La Seine*
Like dogs gone insane.
Fantasizing about Versailles
Like witches in search of an eye.
Chanting *La Marseillaise*
With such ridiculous airs;
Frenchies ogling at ex-colonies
Promoted to neo-colonies.
Lauding their robust health
While stealing all their wealth.
Hailing their independence
But chaining them to dependence.

All seems so foggy
At the reunion of the Froggies
Everything so unreal
Like a distorted film reel.
An assembly of strangers
Claiming to be blood brothers...
A strategy for duplicity
A recipe for calamity.

This was "La Francophonie"

Gruesome francofolly

In all its deadly fury.

*** Amand'la**

Destiny was beckoning
On this day of reckoning
Kaffirs obediently toeing the line
And watching from the sidelines,
The clash of the Titans
Between the Afrikaans
And the pro-Africans
Over sending the clock back
Or liberating blacks;
Gods toying with the future
An apparently bleak future...

Twas misplaced apprehension
As votes called for a new nation
The cherubs had matured
And freedom assured.
Their final verdict
Was a glorious edict
For Mandela
And for Amand'la
For liberty
And for equality.

The losers talked of treachery
And railed against victory
Second rate actors
Daring first class victors
And saying freedom shall not be
That Azania was not free!

But they had it all wrong
For reason had won
Soon Soweto shall be free
Tall and proud for all to see.

*South African nationalist rallying slogan meaning freedom

MAY 6, 1991 (*Eulogy to the young martyrs*)

We shall overcome!
They chanted
Uncaring about the outcome
As the army reacted,
Descending like a Tornado,
A raging inferno.

With deadly bullets
Began the macabre ballet
Teens pulled from their abodes
Then gleefully dragged in mud
And blood.

Detained in abject misery
For alleged treachery,
They lived through terrible moments
And horrible torments.

To them I take off my heart
For daring those without a heart,
The raving neo-fascists
Who promised to grind them to ashes.

Cos they made no deals
But fought for an ideal
The people shall have the power
In the final hour.

The Dreamer (*MLK*)

He was a drum major for justice
Who dreamt of a world totally at peace
For our sinful world he had a vision
That was to become his sacred mission.
He had looked up the mountain top
And seen that oppression must stop.

Humbly he came into Montgomery
For his rendezvous with destiny,
Challenging a system of injustice
With dignified non-violence.
Preaching the gospel of brotherhood,
He called on the Klan to take off its hood
And amidst extreme social hardship
He appealed for true fellowship.

Though slain in action, his vision won
And today his dream lives on,
Ringing loud and clear
That freedom's caravan is near.

His was an idea whose time had come
A beautiful dream engraved on solid gold
That gave hope to the young 'n' old:
"One day we shall overcome!"

Hold On Brother

Valiant freedom fighter
Indifferent to the drug called power
And the dictatorship out to conquer.
Never gave in to despotism
Never succumbed to nepotism
Endlessly struggled for democracy
Yearned to see an end to autocracy.

Out you may be, but
Make hope of despair
Beat these power hungry heirs
Elbow them out of the scene.

Never give up the fight
Zoom in like a crusader
Annihilate these plundering power brokers
Now! stop their arrogant flight
And the crown shall be yours.

Liberty City (*Abakwa*)

For three decades she fitfully slept
Remorseful for having refused to go West...
Then drowsily she struck a deal
With the double-faced New Deal
Whose deceitful words of hope
And its invisible hangman's rope
Steadily made the deal sour
At every passing hour.

Then from behind her hill top
She finally woke up
Loudly saying NO to this betrayal
To this act so disloyal.
Rallying behind a new leader
She swore never to go under
And began playing strange songs
On her legendary gongs;
Freedom!! Freedom!!
Liberty!! Liberty!!
Democracy!! Democracy!!

Now the dictatorship staggers
In spite of its guns and daggers
Thanks to the city's unwavering faith
That she could change our fate
Reshape our collective destiny
And free us from tyranny.
Hold on freedom lover
Darkness will soon be over.

Beyond the Promise

Ain't the world we bargained for
Ain't what millions died for:
The hated curtain's lifted
But darkness is unlifted
Disillusion has set in
And the world's just a confused setting

Beyond the Rhineland
Lies traumatized lands;
Ethnic conflict in Herzegovina
Blood flow in Croatia
Mass discontent in Azerbaijan
Food queues in Kazakhstan.

Across the Atlantic
We watch the antics
Of the planet's solo actor
Barely surviving the great thaw.
One who promised Paradise
After the Eastern demise
But is crippled by recession
And lack of direction;
A limping giant of clay
Now totally at bay.

Deep, deep in the Dark Continent
There's nothing but discontent.
The hated dictators 're gone
But people are still ruled by the gun
The once proud Liberia

Is now as desolate as Siberia
The calm and sunny Togo
Steadily remaking Tshombe's Congo
The legendary Somaliland
Crumbling under a power-hungry band
And inches away from freedom
Azania's still fascinated by serfdom.

In the green South
Liberty's put to rout
And Paradise turned into hell
By the notorious Cartels;
Mighty nations held hostage
And kicked off the center stage
By barons offering the magic whiff
And peddling the white sniff...
The New World Order
The earth's eight wonder
Is nothing but global disorder.

We didn't read beyond the promise
And that was our demise.
We gulped all the fairy tales
And the new order we did hail;
Down with the oppressors
Away with their bloody razors!!
Support for the feeble
Power to the People!!
Jobs for all
Health for all!!
Up with meritocracy
Long live democracy!!

Now we're grounded by poverty
Abject misery and insecurity
With the line between oppressor
And committed liberator
Really hard to see
Except for the great seers...

Beyond the promise
Is the lament of a people misused
Beyond the promise
Is nothing but a desolate muse
Beyond the promise
Is a tale of dreams shattered
Beyond the promise
Is a story of lives battered
Beyond the promise
Is no promise.

The Plunderers

Witness the ecstasy
Of the Upper class
Living its fantasies
By emptying our banks.
Like gold diggers
They plunder and plunder
Swooping all up with itchy fingers,
And pulling the nation asunder.

A desolate people stare
At coffers laid bare.
Empty coffers
With nothing to offer.
Frustration grows
and grows.

It's an age of uncertainty
As the clan persists in insanity,
Totally oblivious of sanity
Of the future none can tell
As we await the knell..
That dreaded knell.

Is it true Mama? (Letter to Winnie Mandela)

For over two decades
You remained Liberty's maid;
A leading symbol of hope
In a land where freedom had eloped.
You went through immense torture
And was denied a stable future
For challenging an oppressive system
That claimed to be the perfect system.
You spent months in solitary
For defying the military
And became the lone bright spot
In a land where racism was a sport.
The struggle became your life
As you fearlessly clamored for light.

Yours was a life without vice
Based on nothing but sacrifice,
An existence of selflessness
In an age of selfishness.
As you kept fighting on
Against injustice that raged on,
The world rose like one nation
And joined the epic confrontation.
To Apartheid's insane actions
She responded with tough sanctions;
An extraordinary act of solidarity
In the face of obnoxious inhumanity.

Remember how we sang out loud
And felt really proud

On that bright February day
As you led the way
For Nelson who was free at last
Free at last!!
How we wept as you held his hand
While he discovered his long forgotten land
Anyone could rightly tell
That this was Apartheid's last knell;
An unforgettable moment
That towered over past torments.

And in the Horizon etched a new kingdom,
The harbinger of ultimate freedom.

But all's now a ball of confusion
And you the center of all discussion.
They say you're not a freedom fighter
But a blood thirsty street fighter;
That you've become Soweto's terror
Azania's latest horror
That your soccer club
Has not balls but deadly clubs
To crush all those who refuse to be wheeled
By your demoniac will.
We hear you've maimed
kidnapped
And even killed!!

Seems like the fairy tale
Is a story gone stale
They say the myth's broken
And the people have woken

We hear you've lost grace
And now live in disgrace.

Mama tell us it's not true
Tell us it's not you
Tell us its another plot
By that dreaded lot.
Mama tell us its not you
Please say its not true.

I Reign No More *(JIB)*

Oh! how I wail
Beneath this cold veil
This struggle all in vain
A painful journey without end;
From this promising world I was wrest
And forcefully sent to rest.

All those lofty plans
Shattered by the Mighty one
Of my rich seeds I shall not reap
Of my sweet wine I shall not sip.
My money count hardly begun
My golden bed never slept upon
The mink coat hardly ever worn !!

The Mighty one erred
I should have been spared.
What a shameful waste
What dreadful haste!
What a callous world
What a heartless world
What an absence of faith
What a twist of fate!
The mighty shall pass on
While the meek live on
I've lost my earthly awe
... I reign no more.

The March

They plan to march
To the freedom arch
To clamor for the liberty
Confiscated by the venal minority
But the march is banned
By the clan of the damned

Freedom's always hard won
So the marchers must go on...
Suddenly the *Mbérés* appear
And it's all panic and fear;
Out come the truncheons
As heads are gleefully bludgeoned

Total confusion reins
As the army strikes and maims
Crushin' all on its passage
Oh! Such terrible carnage!

Marchers beg for a truce
But the army claims tis a ruse
Now all's in a tangle
As bullets volley in from all angles
Slaying marchers in their flight
Oh! What a cowardly fight!
What a gruesome sight!

Why Brother Why? (*Reminiscing about Etekele*)

Why did you leave this way
Without even a last say,
Why did you suddenly go away
When we wanted you to stay;
Not even one last letter
To make us feel better...
Why brother, why?

Why did you abandon those visions
That guided all your actions?
Remember you wanted to change the world
Our sad and sinful world,
Into a place fit to live
Before taking your eternal leave.

I still recall the last day
Of that eventful holiday
You so full of laughter
And promising to come back later.
We recalled your deeds
And all the things we did;
Noble things
Stupid things
Senseless things
But things of our age
As we waited to come of age.

You were one so full of hilarious tricks
But that last trick
Was a most sinister trick...

Now all's just a blurred image
As we live with our helpless rage
At your leaving at that tender age;
So many dreams shattered
So many lives battered
By our eternal absence
That still makes no sense

You should have seen Mama
Seems she'd been struck with a hammer
Oh! how she wailed against fate
And railed against this waste.
But she remained a great woman
Stronger than any living man,
Your loving Mama
Your only Mama.
Today she's still alive
Though not bustling with life.
She's received a great knock
But has withstood the shock.

Didn't you think of lil' sister
The one who really mattered?
You suddenly abandoned her
At the most crucial hour,
Took away your brotherly presence
In exchange for eternal absence;
Now she's left all alone
To face the world on her own
In company of her tears
And her fears.
Why brother, why?

All we feel is a sour taste
At so great a waste.
We'll never forget you
We'll always think of you.
They say its the wish of God
The decision of the Lord.
Our lord we shall not reprimand
For we understand...
But how it pains
Like a thousand canes,
Oh! how it hurts
Like a vicious gun butt.
Surely by the lord you're happy
But we're very unhappy;
We still miss you
We still need you.
God bless you brother
Good-bye brother
Farewell brother.

Njangaland

They called her “miniature”
A beauty so well nurtured
Who stood proud and tall
And was the envy of all
An Island of peace
Where man was at ease

But it was just a veneer
Visible to those who came near
She thrived on bribery
And treachery
On self deceit
That reeked of self defeat;
A land of misery
And no mystery

Her leading scribes
Daily deified the tribe
Causing a rift,
Setting the nation adrift..
Monarchs with the wrong attitude
And no altitude.

Today the cursed triangle's
Crumbling-from all angles
Teetering towards civil strife
As discontent's rife;
A pseudo monarchy
Flirting with anarchy.

"Democracy"

People watched passionately
As giants clashed violently;
"Suffer don finish" one reported
"Sit down fool!" the other retorted.
"Democracy! Democracy! " some chanted
"Crazy demons! Crazy demons!" others shouted.
"Power to the people" some appealed
"Suffer to the people" others decreed.

With determination they all fought
And of consequences they cared not.
Soon the nation was on fire
With people caught in crossfire,
Property destroyed, billions wasted
Lives lost, martyrdom tasted.

It all looked so barbaric and untamed
With the beautiful land aflame
A tolerant nation only in name.
In shock the people turned away
They had not wanted it this way.

False Prophet

His coming filled us with hope
His vision thrilled us like dope
For us the die seemed cast,
Our Messiah had come at last.
But he was another deceitful son
Aiming for a place in the sun
One who promised to wipe our tears
But increased our fears.

Our dream he did discard
By playing tribal cards
And confusing populism
For patriotism.
Now we watch and wait
Mourning our fate
Shall we ever be free?
Shall liberation day ever be?

Disillusion

It's not long ago
Since we said he must go
Since we started the struggle
For our liberties burgled,
Took to the streets
And dared the heat.

It's not long ago
Since we ruffled the great comrade's ego
Making him nearly falter
On his bloody alter;
How he looked out of use
Like a tool so unused.

It's not long ago
Just a short while ago
When people of all ages
Dreamt of positive changes
Believed that freedom was near
With a new nation in the rear.

But 'twas all a mirage
Conjured by our burning rage;
The Comrade still rides on,
All hopes for change gone.
We're back to our haughty indifference
And legendary indolence,
To our passion for booze
And our cowardly dread for the noose.

Lethargy's reborn
And liberty stillborn.

Betrayed (*La Tripartite*)

In dispersed ranks they came
To the great hall of fame
Like lambs to the slaughter
Lulled by the despot's arrogant laughter.
With cries of "save the nation"
They all mounted the alter
But in putting this in motion,
They jettisoned their golden creed
All because of crass greed.

People are plunged into despair
For their idols have erred
Victory's delayed
And democracy betrayed
The oppressor has won
And the fault our own.

Keep On Smiling (*La vache qui rit*)

Keep on smiling
As you dream of power
From your bloodied ivory tower
While all goes hay-wire.

Keep on smiling
Be the docile errand boy
The disposable toy
Of the much hated clan
Our own Ku Klux Klan;
The unshakable tribal tree
That refuses to set us free.
Keep on smiling.

Keep on smiling
As they ruin our industries
Auction our trees
Disperse our ranks
And loot our banks
Plunder our land
While we play the Yes band
Just keep on smiling.

Keep on smiling
As we mourn for our children
Whose ideas are being reined
Violently hushed
And remorselessly crushed;
A lost generation
Full of anger and frustration.

keep on smiling.

Keep on smiling
Though misery's rife
And the nation without life;
Investors leaving town
Businesses closing down
Masses living in abject poverty
Without an ounce of liberty.
Keep on smiling.

Keep on smiling
Amidst the wheeling and dealing
Be the naive post master
While they turn you into waste matter
Be the good old sheep
Dazzled by the king's gold coated ship;
The willing scapegoat
In his threadbare coat.

Keep on smiling.
Play the little god
The only angel of the lord
Thinking you've got it all
When you're in for a great fall.
Bask in your ephemeral fame
As they bring in the flames
Pretend you're having fun
When you're already on the run...
Just keep on smiling.

Arise!

With his henchmen he marches
Enthralled by his limitless power.
Wielding his hateful whip he lashes,
Crushing the masses at every hour.

Brandishing the Olive branch of peace,
He gleefully tears his rivals to pieces
Another tyrant gone crazy
In a desperate bid to stop democracy.

Stop the holocaust
It's too great a cost
End this gory and painful night
Bring forth the long absent daylight.

Stop this ghoulis party
This chaotic rule without a pattern
Give liberty a chance
And see people's rights enhanced.

Mama Africa

Pray Mama pray
Pray pray pray
For your continent
So full of discontent;
The cradle of civilization
Now turns its back on evolution
Preferring bloody revolutions.

Weep weep weep
Weep, Mama, Weep
Your children have refused to grow
And have fallen so low.
Looting and maiming
Hating and killing
Ceaselessly giving birth
And endlessly starving to death.

Weep weep weep
Weep, Mama, Weep
As the once proud children of Africa
Shamefully crawl towards the West
Doing what they know now best;
Begging, begging
And begging.

Pray Mama pray
Pray pray pray
That today's toddlers
And their unborn progeny
Shall mold a new destiny

Restore Africa's lost pride
And end this ruinous ride
Pray Mama pray
Pray pray pray.

Broken Dreams

By the demon's spell they seemed possessed
By their mythical idea they were obsessed.
Theirs was to be the envy of the world
A nation with the best of two worlds.
This hazy concept was seen as "the" solution
And towards it they tolerated no contradiction.

Then came the unforgettable day of decision;
They happily dumped the Great Federation
For a strange and uncertain union
While the world looked on in amazement
Like guinea pigs they prepared for the great experiment
And prayed it shouldn't be an awkward experiment.

But very soon the dream turned sour
As the feared Aryan complex took over.
Though equality was pronounced abstractly
Reality made them inferiors concretely.
"Crush them!" was the majority's war cry.
Alarmed the minority sent out shrill cries
But too late: they had been trapped...

For three decades they watched in dismay
And endlessly cursed that infamous day
Their dreams shattered and set aflame
Their lives never to be the same.
Their natural resources unearthed
While they remained the scum of the earth.
Today they bask in abject poverty
A people with no authentic identity

A minority deprived of its dignity
And callously cheated of its property
The helpless victims of majority rule.
The scorned prophet's predictions have come true...

But hope has not died out completely
Their status they'll change radically;
Theirs shall be a federation
A balanced and equal union
Or the dreaded Third Option
Shall be the only solution.

Discord

Though with a common history
Their disunity's a sad story
Though with the same identity
They've said NO! to one destiny

See how they thrive on suspicion
And how they bask in animosity
Each action the source of confusion
Each statement the basis for controversy.
Theirs is a tangle of contradictions
A shameful tribute to confrontation
An ungraceful waltz of the absurd
The shocking tale of brothers totally at odds

Sleeping Beauty

She fell prey to a clan of vampires
Who secretly brought along her pyre
But cunningly flashed innocent smiles,
Making promises and telling lies;
Deadly wolves in sheep's clothing
To whom honesty meant nothing.

Her white palace now lies unkempt
It has been taken over
By the tyrant from across the river
Who now controls the empire;
The one and only umpire
Who treats his new acquisitions with contempt.

Her fountain's now a forgotten monument
Abandoned in its personal torment.
Gone's the breath-taking fragrance
And the erstwhile elegance
All's now just a desolate scenery
Devoid of its legendary greenery.

Even her majestic tower's no longer sacred
As invaders gleefully expose her secrets,
Violating its mystery 'n' beauty
Then leaving with its booty.
Now it no longer explodes in anger
At being treated in this manner...

Daily her subjects cry out their frustrations
And echo their lamentations

Over their beauty who still sleeps
With her tightly sealed lips.
Their hearts filled with a great ache
They fervently hope that she awakes.
Sadly dreaming about the good days of old,
They wonder what tomorrow holds.

I Know Why the Frogs Croak So Loud

I

Deep, deep in the triangular pond
The frogs loudly profess their supremacy.
Gleefully, they intimidate the peace-loving fish
With their loud and aggressive croaking.
Ugly and clumsy to a fault, they
Preside over the destiny of this
murky, dirty and stinking pond
in all arrogance and vanity.

Frogs, frogs, frogs!!!
Children of a so-called highest caste
"God's own children on earth"...
But it ain't nothing but an illusion
Straight out of a second-rate
conjurer's bag of lousy tricks.

The frogs croak so loud cos
Big brother toad's watching from the banks
Ready to crush anyone who dares
Challenge this hateful Froggy Order.
The frogs croak so loud cos
The mammals of the pond are not yet
aware of their collective strength.

II

But the vain frogs
shall croak themselves hoarse
The arrogant frogs

shall leap themselves lame
Their vain little spots
Shall become scars of shame
Too horrible to exhibit to the world
Their infallible green amour
Shall become porous shields;
Easy targets for the angry ones

The belligerent army of frogs
Shall become as meek as
lambs to the slaughter,
As helpless as infants ripped out
Of the womb's familiar warmth.

The frogs' piercing and fearful eyes
Shall unwittingly become freedom's
Lantern that shall lead the enslaved
Fish out of that sordid pond

III

Yes, I know why the frogs croak so loud
They're hiding their fear of
A future they cannot change;
Yes, I know why the frogs croak so loud
They're mourning for
a tomorrow they can't control

Theirs is the nostalgic
Swan song to a dying order
A pitiful Froggy dirge
For an anachronistic era
A shameful ode to the days of

Of futile dominance
And horrid oppression.

Yes, I know why the frogs croak so loud
And I ain't scared no more!

Gbea

I look at your sores
And I feel the pain of our misery
I walk in your squalor
And I sense our impotence
I witness your slow decay
And my soul slowly dies.

I bask in your torrential downpour
Just to hide my cascading tears
I wait for your mountain's rumble
To drown my cries of anguish
Your blinding gray fog
Barely masks our powerlessness
I stare up into your Amazon-like greenery
And I visualize the gigantic hurdles
On our path to freedom.

But I love you still;
For our determination
Springs from your misery;
In your squalor lies
Tomorrow's beauties;
On your present pain
Sprouts tomorrow's hopes;
From this decay
Shall emerge a new order
That shall bring forth
The promised land.

Boomerang (*EMLA*)

'Twas a strange way
To honor a great day;
Facts not remembered
History dismembered.

The plot was abysmal
Leading to disavowal;
Waking sleeping heroes
Long treated like zeroes
Pulling out achieves
And hailing great lives,
Re-writing history
And solving mystery,
Crusaders exposed vultures
Slowly killing a culture.

Now the Lone star's scorned
And a new dream's born;
That of the twin star
The ten star
The no star...
Complacency's gone
And the heat is on.

Journey's End – Going Back West

It's time to part
To start living apart
'Tis time to unload
For it's the end of the road.
Union's not the answer
For you've been a callous master.

I thought you were family
But you treated me like enemy
God knows I've persevered.
Now I'll listen only to my heart's chime
for I've done my time;
I'm going back West
To start off from where I left.

Freedom Now!!!

This far we've come
In our struggle to overcome
So many mountains we've climbed
So many principles we've imbibed
So many seas we've crossed
So many walls we've crushed;
How we've moved through endless valleys
In our struggle for a new lease
How we've avoided countless cliffs
In trying to turn over a new leaf
How often we've missed the grave
For merely saying we're not slaves.
True we've not arrived
But surely we've survived.

So let oppression be wringed
And let freedom bells ring
That we're about to unbend
About to stop this dreadful trend.
We're the sole owners of our soil
The only masters of our toil.
The time has come today
To put our oppressors at bay
To chart a bright new way
Littered with hope's golden rays.

We Shall Rise Again!!!

From the heights of the Menchum falls
And the heart of the Congress hall
Shall come the long awaited call
That will bring down these walls.

From the mysterious Barombi lakes
And the mythical Oku lake
Shall rise liberty's mermaid
Who shall come to our aid.
From the historic park of Ntarikon
The selfless martyrs shall come
To water the struggle
And break down hurdles.

On the road without a ring
The oppressor shall lose his wings
From the depths of little known Meanja
Shall come marching Liberty's soldiers
From the forests of Fontem
The invader's progress shall be stemmed.
From the confiscated white lodge
Tyranny shall be dislodged
From the forgotten Tombel
Shall ring salvation's bells
From the plains of Ndop
And the lush vegetation of Korup
The people's flag shall be hoisted up.

The masses of Victoria
Contaminated by freedom Malaria

The people of Bansa
Breaking our chains with liberty's saw
The angry spirits of Nyos
Fervently healing our slavery yaws
The wisemen of Batibo
Religiously anointing our arrows and bows
The valiant children of West Mungo
Telling our oppressors to go,
Shall all build a new nation
And give history its real version.

The mighty Fako mountain
And the crumbling Bismarck fountain
Shall spit out freedom's fiery venom
That will end this shameful serfdom;
Our nation shall be born again
And our freedoms forever regained.

Buea February 5, 1992

No Turning Back relives the tumultuous beginnings of Africa's democratization experiment in the early 1990s. The main theme of the collection is an investment in hope and in the resilience of Africans. The poems are loud and clear in their castigation of dictatorship and its miseries. They celebrate the mass resolve and thirst for democracy by Africans for whom there is 'No turning back!'



'A lucid and truly memorable collection of poems. Dibussi forces us to turn back and look at the pivotal volcanic moments in Cameroon's history between 1990- 1993... As a student activist and budding journalist during this historic period, Dibussi captures cadences of this struggle eloquently.'

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- **George Ngwane, Chair, National Book Development Council, Cameroon**



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